

WE CLAIM:

1. A virtual marketplace for negotiating sales of bulk, non-commodity food products, comprising:

a plurality of remote buyers and suppliers of bulk, non-commodity food products interconnected via an international computer network; and

on a computer connected to the network, software operable to

receive, via the network, an RFQ for a food product from a buyer,

present, via the network, the RFQ to at least some of the suppliers,

receive, via the network, one or more quotes for the food product from one or more of the suppliers, and

present, via the network, at least one of the quotes to the buyer.

2. A method of facilitating on-line transactions involving the sale of a food product having a value to a buyer determined by objective characteristics and subjective characteristics, the method comprising:

establishing a standardized rating system effective to objectively describe relative evaluations of one or more subjective characteristics of the food product;

evaluating one or more subjective characteristics of the food product in accordance with the rating system;

applying a rating from said rating system to each subjective characteristic evaluated;  
and

transmitting, via a computer network, at least one of

an RFQ for the food product from a buyer, where the RFQ specifies a desired subjective characteristic of the food product according to the corresponding rating of the rating system, or

a quote for the food product from a supplier, where the quote specifies a subjective characteristic of the food product according to the rating applied to the food product.

3. A method of facilitating a transaction involving the purchase of bulk, non-commodity food products, comprising:

displaying, via a computer network system, a plurality of bulk, non-commodity food products to a buyer;

receiving, via a computer network system, a selection identifying one of the food products from the buyer;

displaying, via a computer network system, a list of food-product-quality characteristics corresponding to the selected food product;

receiving, via a computer network system, a selection from the buyer identifying one or more food-product-quality characteristics from the list; and

presenting, via a computer network system, an RFQ specifying the selected food product and the selected food-product-quality characteristics to a plurality of suppliers.